Introduction

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When asked 'what is sport?', the majority of people will respond that it is an organised activity or game with rules and regulations such as football or tennis. However , this 'Sport' edition of the Journal of Health, Social and Environmental issues hopes to dispel this idea According to Sport England (2001), sport is defined as '...all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels', p.3). This issue is therefore a testimony to the breath of what is sport with a collection of articles which reflects the diversity of the sport focus.

This edition of the Journal of Health, Social and Environmental Issues is very much in keeping with previous issues in that this blend of articles will be of interest to academics, researchers, practitioners, educators and students. A feature of this issue is the large number of contributions from across the London Sport Institute.

The first article, on Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Performance focuses on how neuro linguistic programming techniques can be used to improve performance in athletes. The article demonstrates that NLP is steeped in theoretical research. As an informed article it opens up this area to those who may not have a background in this whilst the discussion of these techniques can be applied to many areas in life.

The next contribution to this area of practice reflects on an interesting case study. This is written from the view of a provisional sport and exercise scientist, undertaking accreditation as part of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Scientist scheme. This not only provides an insight into how to provide psychological support to sports teams but also presents the challenges and learning that takes place by going through this process.

Next is a literature review on how whole-body vibration can be used in helping individuals to recover from injury. This article contains useful suggestions on the effects of acute and long time exposure to vibration on muscle flexibility.

From learning in the field to learning in the classroom, the next article explores problem based learning as a teaching approach which can help develop critical and reflective thinkers. The incorporation of this into teaching programmes for students on Higher Education sports programmes is recommended as a way to help students become more autonomous and independent learners.

The last article examines empirically how participation in different types of physical activity and sports can influence health and physical function in older adults in order to improve quality of life in the later years. Participation in team sports may be an alternative method to achieving physical fitness for older adults. Finally, a review of a sports conference held at Middlesex University earlier on this academic year as well as two book reviews, are provided.

I really enjoyed guest editing this edition of the Journal of Health, Social and Environmental issues and would recommend this experience to anyone who is asked to consider taking on this role. I would like to thank the chief editor, Professor (I)Rena Papadopoulos, for all her

advice and Chris Constantinou for all her first class organisational skills. Many thanks to the contributors and reviewers for their time and effort, as well as to the assistant issue editor, Sheila Cunningham, and a big thank you to Harry Redknapp for his inspirational words on the importance of teamwork.

Finally, as we bask in the residue of excitement left from the Olympics and Paralympics in Beijing and as we look forward to the London 2012 Olympics, remember that 'sport' is much broader than football or tennis. It is about fitness, participation and well being. Life can be difficult and 'sport' can help us overcome obstacles. Participation in 'sport' increases our self confidence, helps us handling stress, develops our sense of focus and encourages us to be motivated. Have a happy, healthy and 'sporty' new year

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Sport psychology and use of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) in sport

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Abstract

This article focuses on how Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques may be beneficial to athletes and to those working in sport. The NLP approach of communication draws evidence from a variety of disciplines and therefore is a model for those utilising life coaching techniques as it enables psychologists, coaches and other practitioners to classify and respond appropriately to athlete experiences (Tosey, Mathison & Mitchell, 2005; Linder-Pelz & Hall, 2007). Hill (2001) presents NLP as a composite model for use within a sports psychology framework as it incorporates psychodynamic concepts, a cognitive-behavioural perspective and a humanistic approach. NLP is therefore an integration of concepts related to a variety of psychological perspectives. The empirical evidence for the use of NLP is limited, however this article is written to provide an informed view of NLP through an introduction of NLP within Sport, an overview of NLP, including briefly its history, the usefulness of NLP in a sports context and the NLP Principles for Success. It is hoped that this article can encourage further research in this area as it demonstrates that many of the NLP presuppositions and concepts are already found in psychological and sport psychological studies.

Key words

Sport psychology; NLP; neuro linguistic programming; mental skills.

Introduction

The mental side of sport plays a significant part in the overall performance of athletes, players and teams. There is substantial research evidencing the variation in athletes in specific sporting situations and across sports in general (Horn 2007). Mental skills which enhance psychological movement or sport skills have been accepted as effective (Driskell, Copper, & Moran, 1994; Feltz & Landers, 1983). The development of psychological skills to enable a greater sense of control in physiological movement as well as in optimising performance has also been demonstrated (e.g. Martens, 1987; Rushall, 1992). These variations in areas of motivation, focus, anxiety and so on, help to explain and predict behaviour. The combination of research and theory with the application of mental skills can be seen as beneficial (Rivenes, 1978).

However, innovative approaches such as NLP can widen the conceptual understanding and also facilitate the growth of sport psychology. NLP focuses on individuals' subjective interpretation and perceived reality. However, the limited research that is available is more of a qualitative approach which can be challenged within the scientific field of psychology (Culver, 2003). Debate around the validity of subjective areas, such as NLP, is not new though researchers such as Holstein and Gubrium (1996) acknowledge the importance in analysing this subjective experience. Researchers such as Dale (1996) have encouraged the use of phenomenological research in examining the subjectivity in sport psychology as it provides a means to examine thought behaviour and emotions. Yet there is still limited research on the affects of NLP in sport (Tosey, Mathison & Michelli, 2005; Deeley & Tod, 2007).

This article is an attempt to introduce the reader to the use of NLP in sport, to demonstrate that many of the presuppositions upon which NLP is based are already

areas being researched in sport psychology and to raise the question for the reader as to whether research into NLP in sport is worthy of further research.

An overview of NLP

NLP can be defined as a series of techniques utilising the language of the mind (the 'Neuro Linguistic' element) to 'program' success, or to change the patterns of behaviour so that individuals can achieve greater success (O'Connor & McDermott, 1996; O'Connor, 2001) NLP is seen as a set of tools and approaches of benefit to athletes in a variety of areas such as business, sales, management, sport, health, education, coaching and therapy.

A search on Amazon.com for books on 'NLP' at the time of writing this article showed 10,213 books, although in terms of academic research, NLP is still a relatively new area. The British Psychological Society (BPS) has recently established a special interest group in Coaching Psychology in order to accommodate the rising numbers of psychologists and practitioners practicing NLP and other life coaching techniques. Also, the University of Surrey ran its first academic conference on NLP in July 2008, where academics and practitioners were encouraged to increase the amount of academic research in this area.

NLP was developed initially by John Grinder and Richard Bandler (Bandler & Grinder, 1979; Grinder & Bandler, 1981). They explored how successful people became successful, and clinically researched 'the difference that made the difference'. They utilised a modelling technique which enables the individual to identify the structural components of another's behaviour prior to teaching this structure to a third person (Einspruch & Forman, 1985; Dilts, Grinder, Bandler, & Cameron-Bandler, 1980; DeLozier, 1987). Bandler and Grinder studied leading therapists at the time who were recognised as excellent communicators: Virginia Satir (1972 -family therapy), Fritz Perls (1979 -Gestalt therapy) and Milton Erickson (1979 -hypnotherapy). From their initial and subsequent studies, they were able to identify communication patterns and to develop a series of approaches and techniques which formed the basis for NLP. Many of these techniques are being utilised in sport (Lazarus, 2006).

The usefulness of NLP

NLP techniques have three main benefits (O'Connor, 2001, Knight ,2002):

- they aid communication
- they are a series of techniques to change behaviours and beliefs
- they are a series of techniques to help model excellence

There are two aspects to the foundations upon which NLP is built. The first is known as 'the principles of success'; the second is known as NLP 'presuppositions' (Knight 2002; Bodenhamer & Hall, 1999).

The NLP proposed principles for success

There are six principles.

1. Know what you want; be SMART!

Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) in their conceptual model of self regulation and internal feedback illustrate the importance of starting with a goal. The concept of goal setting is a motivational theory which encourages athletes to become more productive and effective (Latham & Locke, 1991). Studies (e.g. Kingston & Hardy, 1997) have demonstrated that rather than establishing only an outcome goal, which just focuses on the results (e.g., winning the game), it is preferable to encourage athletes to develop their own performance goals which will ultimately achieve their own performance best (e.g. making three successful passes or cutting a second off of one's time). Though outcome goals appear to be least effective when used alone, multi goal strategies which train players to be able to administer outcome, process and performance goals may be the most beneficial (Steinberg, Singer & Murphy, 2000). Implementing goal setting techniques has been best demonstrated according to a SMART approach. This is an acronym useful in remember the key characteristics of the technique. Goals are: specific, measurable, action oriented, realistic and according to a time frame (Weinberg & Gould, 1999). Goal setting is important to the athlete and according to Pintrich and Zusho (2002) it is a self regulatory process which begins with learners establishing goals.

2. Be aware, take feedback

Self awareness and self reflection is an important skill for athletes, coaches and educators (e.g. Wade & Pierre, 2001; Moon, 1999). In sport, athletes need to attend to results, assess what is effective, and evaluate what does not work. As there is a mind body relationship, this needs to occur both on a physiological as well as psychological level.

Physiologically, athletes need to be aware and reflective on how the body behaves and reacts in sport. To notice the subtle physiological shifts when performing, and being aware, for example, of the psychological impact that these changes have on performances requires a high level of self awareness. In being aware of -for example- when one is feeling at one's best compared to feeling unwell, or the bodily feeling when successful in a high jump attempt compared to an unsuccessful jump will assist in optimising performance.

Psychologically, change revolves around awareness and the process of reflection. The challenge is to find ways of learning from success, being able to celebrate success, learning from non-success, not getting stuck, making judgements and so on, all of which are in essence, learning through the process of reflection. Self awareness and reflection through feedback is important for individual athletes as well as for the development of a high performance team (Ghaye, 2005).

Awareness and being able to understand feedback is an active process for athletes, which empowers them in taking responsibility for actions and performance. This will lead to improvement. Therefore, feedback should not only come from a coach or mental strategist, it has to be developed in an athlete (Boud, 2000).

3. Be flexible

In order to optimise success, players/performers require appropriate attentional flexibility in order to focus on what is essential and to avoid what is distracting (Nougier, Azemar, Stein & Ripoll 1992; Martel & Vickers, 2004). Attentional flexibility is threefold (Posner & Boies, 1971; Abernethy, 2001). It is an alertness to switch back and forth between a broad and narrow focus as required. In addition, attention is of a limited capacity and therefore proficiency in attentional skills is important to develop. Finally, attention is a matter of selectivity and therefore the athlete needs flexibility in knowing what to focus on.

Flexibility and feedback in sport involves focusing on physical actions; this could be the effects of the action rather than the action itself (Wulf, McConnel Gartner & Schwarz, 2002), while maintaining positive cognition thus preventing negative thoughts from interfering with performance.

4. Build and maintain rapport

Rapport is a term used in NLP to describe a feeling of mutual trust between two or more people. The deeper the rapport, the more athletes will unquestioningly follow the coaches' instructions. Carl Rogers (1951), the father of counselling psychology, emphasised the importance of rapport as a foundation to any (therapeutic) relationship.

Rapport between a mental skills coach/sport psychologist and player is essential. A relatively inexperienced mental skills coach who has built great rapport will almost certainly get better results as a mental skills coach than someone who has years of experience but poor rapport skills. Rapport is also useful in a team context (Turman, 2003), where it helps teams to bond. Satisfaction within a cohesive team is stronger than for a group of individuals who may be technically very good but who haven't bonded. Techniques for how to build rapport with athletes can be found in Lazarus (2006) and Knight (2002).

5. Operate from a physiology and psychology of excellence

The mind–body connection is acknowledged as important within psychobiology and has been researched in areas such as stress, arousal and anxiety.

In NLP, positive thoughts along with body movements and posture are appropriate for someone seeking optimal results. Chopra (1989) drawing on the work of Dr Candace Pert, the then Director of the brain biochemistry division at the National Institute of Mental Health) refers to the entire mind-body system as a 'network of information' (p66).

The impact of thoughts on the body is illustrated by Robbins (2000), a leading exponent of NLP and world famous NLP coach. In utilising NLP, Robbins showed Andre Agassi (former 1992 Wimbledon champion) a video of his 1992 5-set victory over Goran Ivanisevic. Robbins drew Agassi's attention to when both players were walking out onto the court. Robbins asked him what he was thinking (noticing Agassi's purposeful stride onto the court). Agassi replied words to the effect of "I'm gonna whoop you, you don't stand a chance!"

Robbins played a video clip for Agassi of a match in the mid 1990s, when the same two players played each other (and Agassi's world ranking had dropped significantly). Robbins noticed a different physiology in Agassi, and asked him what he was thinking at that point. Agassi replied with words to the effect of, "I'm remembering the last time he beat me and hoping it's not going to be that bad today!" One of the first pieces of coaching that Robbins gave Agassi was to change his posture, in other words adopt a physiology of excellence.

6. Take action!

In NLP, there is a difference between 'knowing what to do' and 'doing what you know'. Schon (1983) discussed how competent practitioners know more than they can say and display a 'knowing in practice'. In the midst of action reflection, a revelation of intuitive knowledge can surface which can assist in the situation of being pro-active. Schon outlines the concept of 'knowing in action' where actions, recognitions and judgements are carried out spontaneously and where little thinking is evident either before or during performance. Reflection 'in action' is an improvisation and consists of varying, combining and recombining. It is a set of figures within the schema which bounds and gives coherence to the performance, and although most sportsmen and sportswomen, especially top performers, are generally very motivated, there is almost always scope to improve

one's effectiveness; taking action to do the tasks which may be in some way unpleasant is essential. Knowing what to do can be facilitated through action learning which involves learning from others. Action learning is a theory of learning, a methodology and a technique.

NLP 'Presuppositions' – Key underlying beliefs

The second of the two aspects to the foundations upon which NLP is built are known as the 'NLP presuppositions'. These are not 'truths', merely a series of beliefs and assumptions which, when athletes assume and act as if they are true, help athletes to produce better results in whatever field of endeavour they are applied. Here are some of the presuppositions that are particularly relevant in sport. Please also note that these presuppositions are most useful when taken together, not just in isolation.

1. Have respect for the other person's point of view.

An aspect of communication, as explained by 'The NLP Communication Model' (James, Tad & Woodsmall, 1988) and Lazarus (2006) is that all human beings delete, distort and generalise information, based on numerous factors such as life experiences, beliefs and values. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) in his theory of flow also explains how and why information is deleted.

A coach wanting to create change effectively in a player does not need to believe what the player believes. It is not the coach's responsibility to change a player's point of view through an attempt to convince or persuade them. However, by respecting their 'model of the world', change will occur more rapidly. When someone respects one's point of view, even if they do not agree with it, the co-operation is more likely.

2. The meaning and outcome of communication is in the response you get.

Conventional wisdom suggests that by clearly communicating thoughts and feelings through words, that another person should understand the meaning.

However, they will respond to what they think you said, not what you think you said. Coaches can determine how effectively they are communicating by the response they get from the person they are communicating with. In addition, when this presupposition is accepted, then coaches or psychologists or mental strategists are able to take 100% responsibility for all of their communication rather than blaming others when they do not do what they think that they are being asked to do (see also the section on 'Cause and Effect' below). This means that coaches and psychologists are in charge for changing the way they communicate if appropriate.

So as a mental skills coach or a sports coach, when a player is asked to alter her usual way of playing in the team for tactical purposes and she does not do what was requested, then it is the responsibility of the coach or sport psychologist to change the way they are communicating with her.

Similarly, when coaching someone on a new skill, if what they are doing is not what was requested or demonstrated, then the 'fault' is due to the coaches communication (apply this in conjunction with point 4 below).

3. There is no failure, just feedback.

If an athlete does not succeed in something, this does not mean they have failed. They have not succeeded YET, and it could be useful for them to do something differently. They can take the feedback, learn from the experience and hence vary their behaviour and find a different way of achieving their outcome.

According to tennis legend Billie Jean King, athletes should look at failure as feedback (http://www.dailycelebrations.com/failure.htm). Roger Black MBE, 400m champion at World and European Games, spent much of his career thinking about what would happen if he did not succeed. He finally worked out that there was no such thing as failure, and when he knew that, he really had the ability to perform under pressure (Grout & Perrin, 2004).

Feedback to athletes needs to be consistent and communicated in an effective manner through supportive language. Besides being useful for the learning experience in sport, the use of positive feedback is related to well being, satisfaction and motivation (Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Sideridis, 2008) as well as to self efficacy (Escarti, & Guzman, 1999).

4. Flexibility rules, OK!

According to this presupposition, the person with the most flexibility (choices) of behaviour will have the most influence on the situation. The more options and techniques available to the mental skills coach, the more likely it is that an answer or an approach that works will be found. Similarly, the more options an athlete or a team has then the more likely it is that they will achieve the result set by the coach. Adaptability is important not only within the sporting skill set but also as the ability of players and teams to adapt to weather conditions, the opposition's tactics, referees' decisions, the crowd atmosphere, the playing surface and so on. . Flexibility is, in essence, required in order to achieve mental toughness which research describes as being able to function under stress, maintaining a sense of confidence, persevering, bouncing back from lack of success or 'failure' , maintain motivation and keeping a strong sense of focus (Bull, Shambrook, James, & Brooks, 2005).

If this idea is extended to include communication, then the more ways a coach can communicate ideas, the more likely a player's perceptions and actions can be altered. Flexible listening acknowledges that different situations require various strategies so coaches need to expand their communication system beyond speaking and listening (Hardy, Burke & Crace, 2007).

5. Athletes have all the resources that they need to make the changes they want.

Athletes themselves are not unresourceful, but they are experience unresourceful states ('state' can be defined as feeling emotionally at any given moment). When athletes change their state from negative to positive, they then have access to all the resources within them to accomplish far more than they can when they are feeling unresourceful states such as nervousness, fear, or overwhelming pressure. Knowing that the resources are available will help athletes to meet important psychological needs of required competence, autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan 1985; 1991, 2000) for personality development and regulation which is also important for the well being of athletes (Reinboth, Duda & Ntoumanis 2004).

6. Modelling excellence leads to improved performance

'Modelling' is the process used by Bandler and Grinder in developing NLP, from the theories developed by Bandura (1997). In essence, this consists of observing the behaviour of experts, and finding out how they think before, during and after an event or competition.

Clearly there are limits to someone's capability. But by modelling excellence, improvements can be made by taking the best from the best. As a mental skills coach, by finding sports athletes who do a particular aspect of sport excellently, modelling them and teaching others to do the behaviour, significant improvements in performance can be made.

Cause and effect, results and reasons

The above can be usefully summed up by the concept of 'cause and effect'. In essence, as coach there is either an 'at effect' of some 'cause' over which there is no control and to which the response 'makes' a reaction in some negative way. Alternatively, there can be an 'at cause', being willing to take responsibility for the way we respond to any given situation.

Being 'at effect' is not comfortable – athletes who are 'at effect' make excuses, have lots of really good 'reasons' for not getting the results they want in sport or life generally and usually do not get enough of what they want. When athletes are 'at cause', they take full responsibility for what happens on their life and the way they respond to it; they make no excuses, and tend to get better results in the medium and long-run than if they are 'at effect'.

Clearly even with an 'at cause' attitude, athletes and coaches may not always get the results they want in the short term. However, competitors who are 'at cause' will usually get better results over the long term than those who are 'at effect'.

Summary

This article focuses on how NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) techniques may be beneficial to athletes and to those working in sport. The NLP approach of communication draws evidence from a variety of disciplines and therefore is an effective model for those utilising life coaching techniques as it enables psychologists, coaches and other practitioners to classify and respond appropriately to athlete experiences (Tosey, Mathison & Mitchell, 2005 ; Linder-Pelz & Hall, 2007).

Empirical research on the use of NLP in sport is limited. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the validity of NLP concepts for achieving outcomes. There are periodic studies and guidance on the use of NLP in education (eg. Craft, 2001), sport (e.g. Hill, 2001), training and development (Thompson, Courtney & Dickenson, 2002) as a therapy (e.g. Sharpey 1984; 1987) and in management (e.g. Ashok & Santhakumar, 2002; Dowlen 1996). In addition, the publication of a recent debate on the use of NLP with athletes, written by Deeley and Tod (2008) and an article by Linder-Pelt and Hall (2007) sets the theoretical roots of NLP within its psychological foundations. The issue of whether NLP is more of a set of strategies (Craft, 2001) or techniques, for improving performance (Dann & Dann, 2003) still needs to be addressed. This can only be achieved through research which tests the nature of the NLP model. Empirical studies need to be well designed and investigated if NLP is to be taken as a valid model though it should be acknowledged that NLP already has a strong basis in psychology and in sport psychology as demonstrated in this article.

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Author biography

Jeremy Lazarus is an Executive Coach and High Performance Sports Coach, and a Certified Master Trainer of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). He spent over 15 years in a business career which included senior management and director roles. In 1999, he formed The Lazarus Consultancy Ltd, an NLP training and coaching company specialising in the applications of NLP in business and sport. He is a part-time lecturer at Middlesex University, teaching on undergraduate Sports Psychology modules and on the Psychology of Elite Performance module within the MSc Strength and Conditioning programme. He is the author of '*Ahead of the Game: How to Use Your Mind to Win in Sport*' (frequently in Amazon UK's top 10 books on Sports Psychology), and has appeared on TV and radio several times.

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